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Ketchup Or Salsa?

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Lester Wilson, professor of food science, has won numerous awards recognizing his fun and entertaining teaching methods.

KETCHUP or SALSA?

By Barbara McBreen

or

SALSA?

Photo: Bob Elbert

FUN-FOOD TRIVIA ENTERTAINS AND TEACHES

Do Americans consume more ketchup or salsa in one year?

Lester Wilson knows the answer.

Wilson, a University Professor in food science and human nutrition, has a buffet of tidbits about the science of food. It's the type of fun-food trivia Wilson shares with students in his introductory food science classes.

"Who would have thought, from the condiment standpoint, that more salsa is sold in the United States each year than ketchup?" Wilson asks.

Using humor in the classroom, Wilson says, helps loosen up students. His methods work. He has won numerous awards for teaching and advising. In 2009, he received the State of Iowa Regents Award for Faculty Excellence and this September he received the university's James Huntington Ellis Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Introductory Teaching.

"I try to get students to become good consumers and understand why it's important to understand the labels and how it all relates to marketing," Wilson says.

If you attend any food science student event, you'll find him surrounded by stu-

dents. It's evident he enjoys what he's doing—and that's the advice he gives students.

"I tell students to find something they enjoy and they won't find a better job," Wilson says.

Wilson, who grew up in Portland, originally planned to go into forestry. A chemistry teacher stirred his interest in food and mentors helped him focus on the science of food. After earning his Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis, Wilson came to Iowa State because of its emphasis on teaching and student advising.

He attends every commencement because he enjoys seeing students off at graduation. After graduation, students often contact him to tell him how useful his classes were in preparing them for a career in the food industry.

"When they come back and say I made them successful, I tell them, 'No you made yourself successful, I just helped along the way and gave you some tools,'" Wilson says. "I like to help them develop their critical thinking skills, because in the food industry they have to make tough decisions every day."

Wilson says the popularity of food science is evident in the current trends such as fair trade, gluten free and green products. Food scientists also research ways to reduce obesity, offer nutritious diets, low sodium foods and provide consumers with gourmet dining experiences at home.

"As long as people eat, there will be jobs for food scientists," Wilson says.

From food safety to flavor chemistry to product development to thermal process evaluation, Wilson covers a wide variety of food-related research. One project involves NASA and the development of foods for missions to the Moon and Mars. Much of Wilson's research is focused on soy, so much so that one of his peers posted Dr. Tofu on his office door. ☐

STORIES Recipes

Seasonal Stir Fry

From the kitchen of: **Lester Wilson**

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